

New handbook provides tools for ASEAN parliamentarians to advocate for investments that transform food systems

Phu Quoc, Viet Nam – Southeast Asia attracts billions of dollars a year in investment in the food, agriculture, and forestry sectors. This investment is crucial for food security and poverty alleviation, but to generate long-term sustainable benefits, such investment needs to be responsible. This is a key message of a new handbook developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), with technical support from the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, which was officially launched on 11 July 2023 at AIPA Caucus in Phu Quoc, Viet Nam.

Responsible investment is crucial for transforming food systems, making them more sustainable and resilient, and thereby enhancing food security and nutrition for all and contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Responsible investments generate positive socio-economic and environmental impacts, conserving biodiversity and genetic resources, supporting the integration of traditional and scientific knowledge and promoting innovation and the use of appropriate technologies.

Food and agriculture remain a key priority in ASEAN Economy Community pillar, as indicated in the ASEAN Community Vision. In this regard, ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry adopted the [ASEAN Guidelines for Responsible Investment in Food, Agriculture and Forestry](#) in 2018. These ASEAN Guidelines provide clear indications as to what kinds of investment should be promoted and what conditions should be put in place to attract such investment. They are grounded in the Committee on World Food Security's [Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems](#) (CFS-RAI), the most comprehensive international guidance instrument that defines what is a responsible investment in agriculture.

The new handbook on [Promoting the application of the Association for Southeast Asian Nations \(ASEAN\) Guidelines for Responsible Investment in Food, Agriculture and Forestry. A practical handbook for ASEAN parliamentarians](#) was developed based on the feedback provided by the AIPA Member Parliaments. It highlights the role of parliamentarians as key strategic change makers to boost responsible investment in the region. It provides a comprehensive overview of the specific actions ASEAN parliamentarians can take to support the creation of enabling environments for attracting more responsible investment in food systems, including through passing appropriate laws, ensuring adequate financing and providing parliamentary oversight.

“The finalization of the handbook demonstrates the crucial role of parliamentarians in their effort to mitigate food insecurity, through implementing the guidelines into laws, policies, or national institutional framework, and monitoring.”, said the Secretary-General of AIPA, Siti Rozaimeriyanthy Dato Haji Abdul Rahman, yesterday during the launch of the publication at the 14th AIPA Caucus meeting hosted by the National Assembly of Viet Nam.

“To address the challenge of food insecurity and malnutrition, FAO collaborates with a wide range of partners to support the 2030 agenda through the transformation to more efficient, inclusive, resilient

and sustainable agrifood systems. An important vehicle to support the 2030 Agenda is investment in food systems. This holds particularly for ASEAN as the region is home to a large number of agribusinesses and forestry companies, as well as small-holder farmers” said Mr. Rémi Nono Womdim, FAO Representative in Viet Nam, yesterday during his introduction of the handbook.

The handbook is based on a previous edition developed by FAO and IISD for parliamentarians worldwide entitled [Responsible investments in agriculture and food systems – A practical handbook for parliamentarians and parliamentary advisors](#), but, like the ASEAN Guidelines it addresses, is tailored to the specific context and needs of the ASEAN region.

ASEAN Member States have experienced rapid economic growth in recent decades. As indicated in the [ASEAN Food and Nutrition Security Report 2021](#), the combined total gross domestic product (GDP) of the 10 ASEAN Member States doubled between 2008 and 2019, and the proportion of the population living below national poverty lines declined between 2005 and 2018 across all ASEAN Member States. Yet, an estimated 46 per cent of the population in the ASEAN region is unable to afford a healthy diet, and faces economic, physical, social, and cultural barriers to accessing nutritious, safe, and affordable foods.

ASEAN’s parliamentarians have a crucial role to play in establishing the kind of environment that attracts the investments needed to tackle these challenges, and the new handbook provides them with knowledge to play that role effectively.